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WHA Press Guidance  
February 13, 2002

**VENEZUELA: UPDATE OF STATUS OF U.S.-VENEZUELA  
RELATIONSHIP**

**Question: Can you update earlier comments regarding the status of the U.S.-Venezuela bilateral Relationship?**

**ANSWER: WE DO NOT HAVE ANYTHING FURTHER TO ADD TO OUR RECENT STATEMENTS ON THE STATUS OF THE U.S. RELATIONSHIP WITH VENEZUELA. IN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, SECRETARY POWELL EXPRESSED THE UNITED STATES' CONCERN REGARDING RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN VENEZUELA. THE SECRETARY'S REMARKS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.**

**[BACKGROUND: Recent comments by the Secretary, CIA Director Tenet, and INR A/S Ford have been trumpeted across the Venezuelan press. Venezuelan President Chávez is being attacked more and more aggressively by both the anti-Chávez opposition and the media. Both the opposition and the Venezuelan media are eager for a U.S. statement that would contribute to the public pillorying to which Chávez is being subjected.**

**During his February 5 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Secretary, responding to a question from Senator Helms, stated:**

**"Briefly, we have been concerned with some of the actions of Venezuelan President Chávez and his understanding of what a democratic system is all about. And we have not been happy with some of the comments he has made with respect to the campaign against terrorism. He hasn't been as supportive as he might have been. And he drops in some of the strangest countries to visit. And I'm not sure what**

inspiration he thinks he gets or what benefit he gives to the Venezuelan people from dropping in and visiting some of these despotic regimes. We've expressed our disagreement on some of his policies directly to him and he understands that it is a serious irritant in our [relations]. He's very -- he gets quite defensive. We've had our ambassador in on a couple of occasions, and he became quite defensive. And we have also gone to some of our friends in the region to also suggest to President Chávez that there perhaps are better ways to deal with a campaign against terrorism and better ways to deal with the challenges his country is facing. We respect to the specific issue on the tape and the support of narco-traffickers, I saw those reports, but I think I'd better wait until I get a complete analysis before I comment on any particular charges."]